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Humanitarian affairs segment

Provisional summary record of the 32nd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 16 July 2008, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Park In-kook (Vice-President) ..... (Republic of Korea)

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In the absence of Mr. Mérorès (Haiti), Mr. Park In-kook (Republic of Korea), Vice-President, took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (*continued*)

Election of a member to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (E/2008/9/Add.14)

1. **The President** invited the Council to elect, by secret ballot, one member from the Group of Asian States to fill a vacancy which would arise from the resignation of Ms. Xiaomei Qin (China) on 31 December 2008.

2. *At the invitation of the President, Mr. Flores (Bolivia) and Mr. Skau (Sweden) acted as tellers.*

3. *A vote was taken by secret ballot:*

Number of ballot papers:	*43*
Invalid ballots:	*3*
Number of valid ballots:	*40*
Number of members voting:	*40*
Required majority:	*21*
Number of votes obtained:	
Mr. Eugenio A. Insigne (Philippines):	*22*
Mr. Berenado Vunibobo (Fiji):	*18*

4. *Having obtained the required majority, Mr. Eugenio A. Insigne (Philippines) was elected a member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for a term beginning on 1 January 2009 and expiring on 31 December 2010.*

Elections postponed from the previous session

Commission for Social Development

5. **The President** informed the Council that Gabon had been endorsed by the Group of African States to fill the remaining vacancy on the Commission for Social Development allotted to that Group for a four-year term beginning at the first meeting of the Commission's forty-eighth session, in 2009, and expiring at the close of the Commission's fifty-first session, in 2013. He took it that the Council wished to elect Gabon by acclamation.

6. *It was so decided.*

7. **The President** said that he took it that, in the absence of any other candidates for election to the Commission for Social Development, the Council wished to further postpone the election to the Commission of one member from the Group of Eastern European States and two members from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States for the same term of office.

8. *It was so decided.*

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

9. **The President** informed the Council that the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been endorsed by the Group of African States to fill the remaining vacancy on the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice allotted to that Group for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 2009. He took it that the Council wished to elect the Democratic Republic of the Congo by acclamation.

10. *It was so decided.*

Commission on Science and Technology for Development

11. **The President** informed the Council that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea had been endorsed by the Group of African States to fill the remaining vacancies allotted to that Group for a four-year term beginning on 1 January 2009. He took it that the Council wished to elect them by acclamation.

12. *It was so decided.*

13. **The President** said that he took it that, in the absence of any other candidates for election to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Council wished to further postpone the election to the Commission of one member from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and two members from the Group of Western European and other States for the same term of office.

14. *It was so decided.*

Programme Coordination Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

15. **The President** informed the Council that the Congo had been endorsed by the Group of African States to fill the remaining vacancy on the Programme Coordination Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS for a three-year term

beginning on 1 January 2009. He took it that the Council wished to elect the Congo by acclamation.

16. *It was so decided.*

Nomination postponed from a previous session

Committee for Programme and Coordination

17. **The President** informed the Council that the Group of African States had endorsed the nomination of the Central African Republic for election by the General Assembly to the Committee for Programme and Coordination. He took it that the Council wished to nominate the Central African Republic for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 2009.

18. *It was so decided.*

19. **The President** said that he took it that the Council wished to further postpone the nomination of three members from the Group of Western European and other States for election by the General Assembly to the Committee for the same term of office.

20. *It was so decided.*

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*) (A/63/81-E/2008/71 and A/63/84-E/2008/80)

21. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that the frequent and serious natural disasters of recent years, and their social, economic and environmental consequences, had given a new dimension to the responsibility of States and the international community for preventing such disasters, managing humanitarian assistance and finding solutions to climate change-related issues. The report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/63/81-E/2008/71) highlighted the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Asia, the region worst affected by natural disasters, and Africa, which also faced complex emergencies due to persistent armed conflict leading to the mass displacement of people, increased vulnerability of disadvantaged segments and greater poverty. In addition, the impact of climate change and rising food and oil prices were undermining Governments' efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

22. His delegation therefore agreed with the Secretary-General that humanitarian assistance should be better coordinated. It also stressed the guiding principles and provisions of General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 62/94 and supported implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 on building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters, in particular by providing appropriate levels of resources for disaster risk reduction and preparedness, and response to humanitarian emergencies, with close cooperation between the United Nations system and national authorities.

23. Other remaining challenges to be addressed included capacity-building, the development of partnerships and the need to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and safeguard access to humanitarian assistance, while ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law.

24. **Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein) said that the Council's humanitarian affairs segment provided an important opportunity to address key challenges such as mitigating the humanitarian consequences of the global food crisis and ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

25. The dramatic increase in food and commodity prices since the beginning of 2008 had posed major challenges for countries relying heavily on food imports. The complex and interlinked causes of the food crisis should be addressed without delay by all States and the appropriate international organizations. The development of a comprehensive framework for action by the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis was to be welcomed, but that framework must be constantly updated and further developed by the relevant United Nations actors.

26. Emergency measures should be put in place to mitigate the effects of poor harvests, natural disasters, high oil prices and commodity speculation. At the same time, State-imposed policies must not exacerbate the structural rise in food prices. The export restrictions imposed by major exporters of staple foods and the large-scale opening up of markets by major importers to secure local supplies could have fatal consequences. Food supplies needed for humanitarian purposes must also be allowed to circulate without hindrance and more donors should do as Liechtenstein had done, increasing non-earmarked contributions to the World Food Programme to make its crisis response more flexible.

27. The safety and security of humanitarian and United Nations personnel was of the utmost importance. Deliberate attacks against United Nations field missions, such as the recent deadly operation against the joint United Nations-African Union force in Darfur, led to unacceptable constraints in access to populations in need and constituted war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. While welcoming the fact that the text of the draft Council resolution on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, currently under discussion, urged Member States to ensure that perpetrators of crimes committed on their territory against humanitarian personnel were brought to justice, he hoped that future resolutions would acknowledge the particular vulnerability of locally recruited humanitarian workers to such attacks. He also called for the Secretary-General and Member States to give urgent consideration to the recommendations of the report of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises Worldwide.

28. **Mr. Benfreha** (Algeria) said that, humanitarian emergencies worsened by the combined effect of climate change, armed conflict and the food crisis, made it all the more important to enhance the coordination of humanitarian assistance within the United Nations system and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

29. As General Assembly resolution 46/182 on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations was the reference framework for the provision of assistance, all responses to humanitarian emergencies should be governed by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. The complex emergencies of the previous year had tested those principles, thereby causing conceptual and operational problems. All efforts to coordinate humanitarian assistance should respect the national sovereignty, integrity and unity of States, give priority to the decisions of national authorities and seek to improve national ownership of humanitarian assistance through capacity-building.

30. To ensure a well-managed and well-coordinated transition to rehabilitation and development, humanitarian assistance should be seen as part of a long-term process rather than a substitute for development assistance. The delivery of humanitarian assistance could also be made more credible and effective by strengthening the role of representative NGOs in the affected countries. Mindful of the ongoing need to develop synergies and cooperation between the institutions delivering humanitarian assistance, the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis should focus on developing appropriate coordinated responses over the short, medium and long term to facilitate access to food.

31. **Mr. Amil** (Pakistan) said that natural disasters, compounded by climatic effects and the soaring price of food, not only retarded the economic and social development of vulnerable groups, particularly the poor, but also hampered many countries' ability to progress towards development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Consequently, post-disaster emergency assistance should not be viewed separately from humanitarian and development assistance. Emergency assistance, rehabilitation and long-term development were linked and should be recognized as different stages of a coordinated effort.

32. Recalling that the recent first meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum had marked a step in increasing the newly strengthened Council's coordination role within the United Nations system, particularly with regard to humanitarian assistance, he said humanitarian actors within and outside that system should engage with national and regional authorities to improve the overall adequacy, predictability, accountability and deployment of resources, as part of an effort to strengthen disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness in developing countries. Moreover, humanitarian response should be governed by the respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182 with assistance being determined by actual needs and delivered by impartial and neutral actors, taking care to maintain fully the civilian character of the humanitarian response.

33. The affected State should play a primary role in the initiation, identification, coordination and delivery of assistance. Humanitarian workers' access to those in need depended closely on effective and timely coordination with national and local authorities on the ground. Predictable and sustainable funding should be established for all humanitarian emergencies, and funding gaps — particularly those for post-disaster recovery — should be addressed. The structure for

regular reporting, management and contributions provided by the Central Emergency Response Fund was positive, and should focus on vital assistance in the initial phases of emergencies.

34. **Mr. Vasquez Romero** (El Salvador), emphasizing the importance of capacity-building to improve disaster preparedness and post-disaster assistance, recalled that the existing problems of climate change and armed conflict had been exacerbated by rising food and fuel costs, leading at times to violent protests and endangering food security, especially in developing countries.

35. Inspired by priority five of the Hyogo Framework for Action to build resilience to disasters, El Salvador had established a national platform for disaster risk reduction, backed up by local plans. Recognizing the close links between emergency response, rehabilitation and development, it had also established a national service for regional surveys, to provide continuous monitoring of natural phenomena. Special attention had been focused on the country's most vulnerable areas. While the country's civil authorities played a key role in managing the response to disasters because their close links with local communities improved the sustainability of disaster response, its armed forces also provided essential assistance because of their logistical and material infrastructure.

36. The role of the Central Emergency Response Fund was vital in improving the capacity for emergency assistance and ensuring that the most vulnerable, particularly those who were the victims of forgotten disasters, received help.

37. **Mr. Kim** Bong-hyun (Republic of Korea) said that the theme of the humanitarian affairs segment, "building capabilities and capacities at all levels for timely humanitarian assistance, including disaster risk reduction", reflected the need for an effective and coordinated response to serious and complex humanitarian challenges, especially in the light of climate change, global food price increases and the energy crisis. Recognizing that preventive action was more valuable than attempts to address disasters after they had occurred, and that national and regional disaster preparedness and reduction capabilities were vital, he said that the Republic of Korea was participating actively in regional efforts to build a disaster management and emergency response system.

38. The Comprehensive Framework for Action developed by the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis had sounded a warning, making clear the need for global food security and poverty reduction. The crisis could become an opportunity if the international community reinforced humanitarian aid, strengthened social safety nets, increased food production and adjusted trade and taxation policies. The Government of the Republic of Korea was committed to providing humanitarian assistance through international organizations and to helping to increase developing countries' agricultural productivity.

39. The Republic of Korea supported efforts to increase humanitarian response capacity, predictability and accountability. As the rapid delivery of relief goods and services to those in need was the key to successful assistance, the restriction of humanitarian workers' access to recipients, and the growing number of attacks on such workers, were grave challenges. National authorities should take every possible step to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. Acknowledging the need to mainstream the issue of gender into humanitarian response efforts and inter-agency coordination of such efforts, the Republic of Korea welcomed the progress made in updating the policy of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on gender equality in humanitarian action, and the launching of the United Nations action against sexual violence in crisis.

40. **Mr. Cancela** (Uruguay) applauded the efforts of the many humanitarian workers who risked their own lives to help those in need. The safety of such workers should be protected. In the view of his delegation, the Council's humanitarian affairs segment should help to build an environment of trust in humanitarian action, emphasizing that such action should be undertaken in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence established by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182.

41. The quality and speed of emergency response measures could only be improved if humanitarian workers were given access to those in need. It was unfortunate that the Secretary-General was forced to point out repeatedly that obstacles to such access remained even when international humanitarian law decreed that it should be provided. Efforts to prevent and alleviate suffering among the most vulnerable victims of humanitarian emergencies, especially

women and children, should continue. As humanitarian intervention was intrinsically a civilian undertaking, there should be a suitable connection between the emergency response activities of State entities and civil society organizations. Moreover, those organizations' contribution to the global response to emergencies should be properly recognized.

42. As the effects of climate change and the food crisis had clear effects on humanitarian assistance needs, the multiple causes of those phenomena should be addressed, ensuring that the most vulnerable were protected, that regional variations in the food security situation were taken into account and that the need for capacity-building and sustainability was considered. Local communities were the first responders in the wake of a disaster, and they remained in place after the situation had been stabilized, facing the task of reabsorbing refugees and returnees. While the primary responsibility for emergency response lay with the State in which a disaster occurred, the international community should ensure that assistance was available. The international community should also consider the social and economic impact of humanitarian emergencies on the development of the affected countries, particularly those already suffering from extreme poverty.

43. **Mr. Siles Alvarado** (Bolivia) said that the severity, frequency and magnitude of natural disasters demonstrated the need for a more efficient and effective international response mechanism. Coordination between donors and recipients should be strengthened, so that international humanitarian assistance could be channelled quickly to the most vulnerable sectors. It was important to recognize the link between emergency assistance, rehabilitation and long-term development.

44. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) enabled the United Nations to respond to natural disasters in a timely manner and provided an appropriate mechanism for responding to the demands of affected countries. However, humanitarian assistance must not be politicized or made conditional upon compliance with requests that violated the sovereignty of States; rather, it must be unconditional and channelled through affected countries' own organizations, with humanitarian organizations playing an advisory and supervisory role.

45. Bolivia had experienced severe flooding in the past three years. As at 31 March 2008, over 97,000 families throughout the country had been affected, more than 49,000 of them directly. In response, humanitarian assistance had been provided by the National Civil Defence System, supported by international humanitarian agencies. The United Nations system, in cooperation with the competent national bodies, had launched an international appeal for assistance for the affected families. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) had approved requests exceeding $2 million, executed by various United Nations agencies through projects drawn up jointly with the Emergency Operations Centre and the Department of Civil Defence and International Cooperation. With a view to maximizing effectiveness, the Ministry of National Defence and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had signed an agreement for the administration of external donor funds.

46. At the national level, his Government had approved Supreme Decree No. 29308, which required all economic resources, donations and transfers to be registered, regardless of their origin; some of those resources were administered directly by such entities as United Nations agencies, NGOs and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

47. At the subregional level, the Andean Community had decided to allow third countries to join the Community as associate members, thereby paving the way for the incorporation of other countries from the region and joint responses to emergencies. The fact that Chile and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) were now associate members would facilitate implementation of the project entitled "Support for Disaster Prevention in the Andean Community" (PREDECAN Project), the main objective of which was to support institutional capacity-building.

48. Noting with concern that most of the Organization's humanitarian responses had been essentially palliative in nature, he stressed the importance of preventive measures. His delegation strongly condemned the acts of aggression that were behind most requests for humanitarian assistance and pointed out that such assistance only alleviated the horrors of war.

49. The parameters of sustainable development should be redefined, taking as a starting point the need

to protect the planet. Consumption patterns must be changed, the exploitation and use of natural resources optimized and steps taken to prevent new energy sources from becoming the main causes of the global food crisis. The best humanitarian assistance that the world could offer current and future generations consisted of a more rational planning of its actions.

50. Lastly, on behalf of the people and Government of Bolivia, he expressed profound sympathy for the innocent victims of the violence in Darfur and condemned all acts of violence against humanitarian workers in conflict zones.

51. **Ms. Jayasuriya** (Sri Lanka) said that the increasing incidence and intensity of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies in recent years and, currently, soaring food and fuel prices called for concerted and coordinated responses at all levels. The theme of the 2008 humanitarian affairs segment was, therefore, pertinent and timely.

52. Her delegation reaffirmed that the State had primary responsibility for caring for the victims of humanitarian emergencies and emphasized the importance of full respect for the humanitarian principles set out in resolution 46/182 during the provision of humanitarian assistance at the request and with the consent of the affected State. While effective and efficient management of existing resources and enhanced coordination among national and local institutions were essential, increasingly complex and transnational challenges called for closer coordination and cooperation among nations. The unprecedented scale of recent natural disasters demonstrated the important role of international assistance and cooperation in facilitating and strengthening national response capacity.

53. Sri Lanka had been afflicted by terrorism for over two decades. Despite many challenges, her Government had continued to provide timely and adequate emergency humanitarian relief to people living in areas affected by the conflict. While such relief was key to overcoming the immediate effects of humanitarian disasters, rehabilitation and long-term development were also essential. Accordingly, Sri Lanka's post-tsunami recovery had been based on a gradual transition from the provision of emergency relief to the establishment of sustainable livelihood and development programmes. In that regard, she welcomed the international community's continued support for the transfer of technology, knowledge and funding to further develop national disaster preparedness and response capacity.

54. Recalling priority five of the Hyogo Framework for Action, she said that her Government had made disaster management a national priority by, inter alia, approving the 2005 Disaster Management Act, launching the disaster risk reduction road map for the period 2005-2015, establishing an early warning system and designing disaster mapping and evaluation programmes.

55. She welcomed the various recent United Nations system initiatives, including the High-level Conference on World Food Security held in Rome. Severe droughts, frequent floods and virulent epidemics had taken a toll on the populations and economic potential of developing countries and undermined their efforts to achieve internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. She endorsed the call for more research into the link between the humanitarian consequences of climate change and the need for greater investment in disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

56. While recognizing the need for early implementation of the Bali Action Plan established at the 2007 United Nations Climate Change Conference, she emphasized that developing countries should have a mechanism for engaging in carbon trading and trading in the value placed on their forest cover. Technological and financial assistance would help developing countries adopt environmentally friendly approaches to development, while the establishment of a climate change adaptation fund would greatly assist vulnerable States.

57. When addressing the humanitarian implications of climate change, emphasis had often been placed on the use of alternative and eco-friendly energy sources. However, the challenges and opportunities associated with increased biofuel use had added a new dimension to humanitarian emergencies, and increasing demand for food had caused price hikes and undermined developing countries' efforts to reduce by half the number of people affected by poverty and hunger. Lastly, increased demand for humanitarian assistance called for increased material and human resources; her Government looked forward to working with international agencies and donor countries in that regard.

58. **Ms. Alzhanova** (Kazakhstan) said that the United Nations should be commended for its role in mobilizing the international response to the recent series of humanitarian emergencies. Kazakhstan was providing assistance to the victims of disasters, and since 2007 had hosted the office of the Regional Disaster Response Adviser for Central Asia of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Currently under discussion was the establishment of a regional warehouse for emergency relief which would strengthen the logistical position of United Nations entities.

59. As no single country or agency was capable of responding to a disaster, efforts should be combined and coordinated. The immediate-response capabilities of the Central Emergency Response Fund should be improved. In the context of disaster preparedness, a code of conduct for emergency response efforts should be widely disseminated to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable, including women, children and the elderly, were addressed. Conscious of the regional and global implications of disasters, Kazakhstan was devoting close attention to the Aral Sea, and urged the United Nations system to help to institutionalize the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, in order to attract more international expertise and avert environmental crisis.

60. **Mr. Mashabane** (Observer for South Africa) reiterated South Africa's commitment to resolution 46/182. The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence should remain the basis of all humanitarian responses and guide the efficiency and coordination of humanitarian assistance. While his delegation agreed that the State had primary responsibility to protect victims of humanitarian emergencies and that the sovereignty of States must be protected when providing relief, current global crises demonstrated the need to further strengthen international assistance efforts.

61. Natural disasters and extreme weather events had lasting consequences on affected populations and adversely affected both the environment and socio-economic development. Disaster management and humanitarian assistance should be viewed within the context of sustainable development and, therefore, as a critical factor in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations development agenda. As developing countries' disaster risk reduction capacity was generally limited, knowledge and expertise should be transferred from developed to developing countries. In that regard, his Government welcomed the establishment of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and would continue to support initiatives aimed at assisting developing countries investing in early warning systems.

62. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was an important instrument for addressing funding gaps in respect of rapid-onset and under-funded crises. The recent external evaluation had clearly demonstrated its effectiveness in improving predictability: despite constituting only 4 per cent of annual global humanitarian assistance it had covered 72 per cent of the funding requested in consolidated appeals and flash appeals in 2007. Even so, the international community must continue to provide additional resources for the Fund to ensure that the humanitarian community's financial needs were met fully. Making needs-based humanitarian assistance more effective was a key part of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance. To that end, the needs of vulnerable communities must drive humanitarian responses. Assessment and data collection must be strengthened to provide effective information for Governments, humanitarian actors and donors. In that connection, South Africa looked forward to participating in the CERF evaluation later in 2008; would continue supporting the Fund; and was proud to be among the top 25 contributors to it.

63. Welcoming the establishment of the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and the adoption of the Declaration on World Food Security and the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy, South Africa fully supported the call in that Declaration for the international community to take urgent and coordinated action to combat the negative impacts on the most vulnerable of soaring food prices, and to help developing countries and countries in transition to expand agriculture and food production and increase public and private investment in agriculture, agribusiness and rural development. Furthermore, donors should continue to be engaged in ensuring the effectiveness of United Nations action and make more funding available to cope with the demands of the global food crisis and other humanitarian emergencies. Moreover, the Organization's food-related agencies should continue to be allowed to

stimulate local food production through procurement at the national level.

64. Financial assistance should continue to flow to developing countries to reduce existing risks and prevent the emergence of new risks. Greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening the financial mechanisms for disaster risk reduction and establishing sustainable funding for underresourced sectors. Effective coordination of humanitarian assistance remained critical. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs could assist by making the role of Humanitarian Coordinator fully effective and adopting a well-developed and interactive cluster approach, bearing in mind Governments' leadership role.

65. Lastly, his delegation strongly condemned the recent senseless killing of humanitarian personnel, called on all Member States to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel working in their territory, and expressed appreciation to all those humanitarian personnel who chose to serve the needs of communities at risk.

66. **Mr. de Looz Karageorgiades** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) welcomed the holding of the first Development Cooperation Forum and the adoption of the 2008 ministerial declaration, which highlighted a number of challenges requiring urgent and collective action by the international community. The Order of Malta's new Grand Master had led humanitarian missions in Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo and closely followed international events and recommendations. The Order, which enjoyed diplomatic relations with over 100 countries, remained faithful to its original mission of helping the sick, the poor and the underprivileged, regardless of their race, origin or religion. It was present on five continents, with 12,500 members, 80,000 volunteers and 11,000 qualified medical personnel in 120 countries.

67. His delegation had noted with interest the observations, conclusions and recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/63/81-E/2008/71), particularly those relating to the need for humanitarian assistance to be conducted in compliance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Those principles were at the heart of the activities of the Order and, in particular, of Malteser International, established in 2005 to create a link between emergency assistance, recovery and development assistance and to respond rapidly to crisis situations. His delegation agreed that new patterns of hunger required strengthened partnerships.

68. The various meetings in the economic and social field scheduled for 2008 provided a good opportunity for the international community to review and improve its development policies. The Order of Malta stood ready to contribute to that process and to reaffirm fundamental values and respect for human rights, in order to achieve peace and security throughout the world.

69. **Mr. Osman** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the Council's capacity-building discussion was particularly relevant to the international Red Cross movement, whose emphasis was on humanitarian assistance and capacity-building at the community and national levels. When communities were stronger and nations were better able to address the vital needs of the population, whether in emergencies or longer-term development, the demands for international assistance were dramatically diminished.

70. It should be remembered that invariably the first on the scene in a disaster or in ravaged villages, towns and cities was the local Red Cross or Red Crescent volunteer. Volunteers and the communities from which they were drawn were the critical hub for effective action, and the foundation for national capacity in disaster preparedness, risk reduction and initial response operations. IFRC pleaded for more investment in its work.

71. The Hyogo Framework for Action was particularly relevant to natural disasters and climate change, but its ultimate goal was the building up of safer and more resilient communities. More explicit consideration should be given to the essential link between humanitarian assistance, recovery and longer-term risk reduction and development. At the International Red Cross Conference in November 2007, international disaster relief guidelines, incorporating international disaster-response laws, rules and principles, had been adopted to provide a stronger legal framework for domestic disaster response. As United Nations Members took up those guidelines, the international humanitarian response to major disasters would become smoother and more effective. Member States were encouraged to turn to the National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies as

auxiliaries to their national authorities in the delivery of humanitarian services and to include them systematically in national platforms for disaster risk reduction.

72. Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian action always rested on full compliance with the fundamental humanitarian principles of the Red Cross movement, but IFRC was concerned that some of the other humanitarian actors were influenced by political or military objectives, and urged all Member States to ensure the observance of humanitarian principles.

73. The Red Cross movement appreciated the Secretary-General's concern for the protection and security of humanitarian personnel. Respect for the integrity of the protective emblems of the Red Cross and Red Crescent were a foundation of their humanitarian mission. They valued the strong collaborative relationship they had with United Nations agencies, and particularly with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

74. **Mr. Gonah** (Observer for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that the Office actively participated in United Nations country team activities and the early recovery phase of humanitarian assistance. It was actively collaborating with the World Food Programme to mitigate the grave impact of the global rise in food prices on refugees and displaced persons; and was also working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on agricultural safety-net activities to pave the way for them to become self-reliant. UNHCR was a part of the Secretary-General's High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and was also involving States in promoting self-sufficiency among the vulnerable populations it sought to help.

75. UNHCR was committed to helping States and communities better address the humanitarian implications of climate change as well, working closely with other humanitarian organizations, working groups and committees tackling that challenge. His Office was pleased that the Secretary-General had reaffirmed the cardinal principles of humanitarian action. In the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Office had led the process of drafting a background paper on humanitarian principles that was currently under discussion in that Committee in preparation for an inter-agency plan of action.

76. UNHCR welcomed the United Nations system-wide commitment to gender mainstreaming and its systematic promotion of gender equality, and endorsed the revised gender policy considered by the Council earlier in 2008. In using the considerable funding it had received from the Central Emergency Response Fund and other earmarked humanitarian funds, it had been the Office's experience that more was accomplished when there was a strong partnership within country teams. UNHCR would join actively in humanitarian financing discussions with all stakeholders. Massive human displacement and mixed migration flows, caused by whatever reason, could be tackled only by delivering as one, thereby providing more effective emergency humanitarian assistance.

77. **Mr. Gebre-Egziabher** (Observer for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)) observed that in humanitarian situations worldwide, the highest concentrations of affected populations lived in urban settlements or had been forced to seek shelter there. It was the responsibility of national and local governments to ensure secure physical shelter for their population, and it was during crises that they were least able to do so, but also, ironically, it was then that the greatest potential development gains could be realized in the shortest possible time frame.

78. Recent disaster response had shown the effectiveness of a range of in situ, non-tent-based emergency shelter options, such as helping survivors build their own shelters from rubble or engaging them in communal clean-up and reconstruction as the first steps towards recovery. In the immediate aftermath of crises, UN-Habitat was primarily engaged in recommending alternative, culturally contextual, transitional shelter approaches, and in the process it exploited short-term emergency investments for longer-term developmental gain, thus potentially shortening the duration of crisis. Working with IFRC, UNHCR and a range of non-governmental organizations, it was providing forms of shelter other than tents or plastic sheeting throughout the world.

79. Directly involved in the establishment of the cluster system, UN-Habitat was the focal point agency for preparedness as well as initial response in the areas of housing, land and property. It was currently leading a group of 10 agencies working in those areas and had been leading efforts to develop tools and mechanisms for property restitution and land tenure rights in both customary and statutory systems. UN-Habitat had

become a full member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in June 2008 and had also received its first allocations from the Central Emergency Response Fund for work in Pakistan and Nepal. In the past decade, the Programme had conducted continuous operations in more than 35 countries and had drawn on its multidisciplinary expertise from normative and operational activities to respond to disasters and emergencies.

80. **Ms. Bilello** (Observer for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that her organization emphasized support for national priorities through capacity-building for disaster risk reduction and during the transitional phase between emergency relief and sustainable recovery. UNESCO responded particularly to requests for capacity-building in educational planning and management, teacher, technical and vocational training, non-formal and distance education and the development of effective early warning systems. It supported public and independent broadcast and other media, offered emergency culture and heritage support, particularly for the management of World Heritage sites. Most recently, it had led rapid sectoral missions to China and Myanmar in the area of education.

81. UNESCO covered many of the scientific disciplines of multihazard early warning systems under the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and administered educational projects in conjunction with the Strategy. UNESCO participated in the cluster system, in the education and early recovery clusters; and in 2008 had begun working with the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs on the subject of Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq, UNESCO was contributing to Iraqi capacity-building, not only in education, including distance education for internally displaced persons and refugees, but also in water resource management, media training in support of the electoral process, and cultural heritage safeguarding. In Afghanistan, the UNESCO literacy initiative for empowerment had been made the national framework for action by all those engaged in literacy activities in the country; in the first phase, aimed particularly at women, it hoped to include 300,000 throughout the country.

82. Through its work in the education cluster, UNESCO was advocating a coordinated humanitarian approach by the United Nations system to the early revitalization of educational systems in devastated areas, at every level of formal and non-formal education. At other times, UNESCO was called upon to make major, urgent interventions in the immediate aftermath of conflicts or disasters to protect World Heritage sites facing imminent and permanent destruction. Support for the cultural heritage could be intrinsic to peacebuilding and the sense of a return to normality for affected populations.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.